



Parashat Ki Tissa
1 Kings 18:20-39
March 7, 2015 / 16 Adar 5775

King Ahab (871-852 B.C.E.) was a King of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and according to (1 Kings 16:29-33) built a “high alter” to the deity Baal in Samaria. He was married to a Phoenician woman named Jezebel who also promoted idolatrous worship. Jezebel, whose name later became synonymous in literature and film as a person of questionable values, is also reported to have persecuted prophets.

One can imagine the influence these two had upon worship in the Northern Kingdom. Alters and Temples to Baal were constructed resulting in open Baal worship and in addition an emerging religious tradition that attempted to meld ancient Israelite practices with the religion of Baal. One can only imagine how distasteful these practices must have seemed to people living in the South. One can only imagine the reaction from God's prophet, Elijah.

In one sense this can be compared to the way many of us react when we come in contact with Hebrew-Christians or the so called Jews for Jesus. Their rhetoric asserts that they are fulfilled or completed Jews. Their rhetoric puts a non-Jewish twist onto our most sacred rituals. For example, the breaking of the matzah at our sederim reflects in their eyes the breaking of his body. The eating of the afikomen which takes place at the end of our seder and is explained as a symbol of desert is re-imagined by them to describe a portent that Jesus will be resurrected and return at the proper time.

On another level, and perhaps much closer to home, the haftarah can ask us to consider how many of our young adults seek to blend our traditions with a larger more dominant culture in an effort to become true citizens of the nation? I realize this is a bit farfetched but haftarah and Torah study can serve as catalysts and allow us to leap from one idea to another. While the story in the haftarah does not adequately describe this situation, it can lead us to consider the reasons that our younger people choose not to remain active Jews and it can develop in us an understanding of the way the people living in the Southern Kingdom at the time might have been feeling.

The haftarah reflects Elijah's greatest moment when he attempts to ridicule the prophets of Baal and help our people to realize that they were worshipping a false God.

This morning's Torah reading recalls our people's greatest apostasy, the worshipping of the Golden Calf. It is linked to the haftarah through the apostasy that takes places in both places at

different times. Moses and Elijah both ascend mountains and both fight on behalf of their God, our God. Each of them forces our people to choose for God and to destroy the blasphemers. The haftarah challenges us to consider the nature of what we worship and to recognize that our faith can be displaced or misled by the governing culture. It also reminds us that we have the power to choose.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for March 6, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of numerous books, including "Understanding the Haftarah. An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership". [Both of these books are available in the FJMC on-line store]